

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



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*I was a stranger and you made
me welcome ...*

Newsletter 105 March 2022

The Project aims to:

- * provide hospitality and practical support for people seeking asylum
- * actively network with like-minded individuals and groups who are working for justice for asylum seekers
- * promote advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers
- * raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and concerns through a range of activities

The story of a young girl (recently reported by Amy Mackinnon in [Foreign Policy](#)) has allegorical overtones. Masouma Tajik was only 2-years-old when the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan cast out the Taliban from their position of power in that country. Then after 20 years of war, the U.S. left, and the Taliban took over again resulting in a huge number of Afghan refugees.

Tajik dramatically escaped from Afghanistan when Kabul was captured by the Taliban, with no hope of staying in her country. A Ukrainian Air Force plane took her and others to Kyiv on Aug. 22.. Now she finds herself, unbelievably, stuck in another major conflict, in a country she knows little about. In the meantime, the other victims of the story are Masouma's family for whom she is the only bread winner.



What we know with certainty from history is that every war, every use of armed combat, every use of force against a country or people results in a humanitarian catastrophe. The victims are ordinary women, men and children. Some escape and become refugees.

The current impotence of calls for peace and dialogue is a startling reminder that the world is a very insecure place for many people. Russia is actually a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and President Putin announced the invasion of Ukraine during an emergency meeting of the that Council. How could politically savvy and powerful world leaders have failed so spectacularly in addressing and negotiating grievances on both sides? This is a stark reminder that a rules-based world order does not exist. Of course the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan and other recent crises have shown the same thing.



Gillian Triggs
@GillianTriggs

Eyes On Offshore

A society cannot stand for human rights unless it stands for the human rights of all – including refugees, migrants, stateless people, minorities and others. When anyone's human rights are denied, everyone's rights are undermined.

[#HumanRightsDay](#) 🧡

Many of us who have been supporting refugees (left for years in the political limbo of 'asylum seekers') witness the desperation this causes for so many. A world where systematic justice is pursued by all leaders rather than a last minute scramble for a solution seems the only answer. All of this seems too big for people like us and indeed for small powers like Australia. However, one country acting decently and with a strong human rights framework could be a model. Australia is certainly not that now. We could begin by advocating strongly for a statutory Bill of Rights.

BASP believes:

Every person, irrespective of age, race, **gender or religion has the right to live safely, free from persecution**. When applying to Australia for protection, asylum seekers should be treated with dignity and respect and their claims should be processed with expediency.

Significant injustices suffered by people seeking asylum in Australia?

Australia treats asylum seekers who have come by boat cruelly, one could say barbarically.

- Hundreds of people are detained arbitrarily and indefinitely in onshore and offshore detention centres without hope or future.
- More than 80 refugees and asylum seekers transferred to Australia from Papua New Guinea and Nauru for medical or other reasons remain in detention. The great majority have been granted refugee status under the Refugee Convention, but for unexplained and apparently arbitrary reasons, some have been released into the community and some have not.
- Supervision of these centres has been outsourced to private companies
- All who arrived in Australia in a boat after 2013 have only temporary protection visas.
- 28,000 families are waiting for family reunion (most for nearly ten years)
- Approximately 230 refugees and asylum seekers remained in Papua New Guinea and Nauru
- Following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August, more than 100,000 Afghan people applied for visas to leave Afghanistan and none have been granted. The vast majority of Afghans who applied for protection visas in the past have been granted refugee status.

Ironically, in her comments on International Human Rights Day, last year Foreign Minister Marise Payne said, “This year’s theme of equality is a timely reminder of the indivisibility and universality of human rights” and “Australia is deeply concerned by instances around the world of arbitrary detention.”

With recent events in Afghanistan, and Ukraine, we need no reminders that in volatile situations people flee for their lives. They seek a safe place usually close to where they have lived but at other times whatever country they can get to. The usual way of seeking protection is to go to a country and ask for protection. In Australia, ‘seeking asylum’ is often seen as being the ‘wrong’ way to come. There is the rhetoric that people should line up in a mythical queue and be invited to come in. In fact, by signing the Refugee Convention (with 148 other countries) after World War II, Australia agreed that people seeking asylum should not be returned to the country they have fled from or sent to any other country.

So what does Australia do that flouts that agreement?

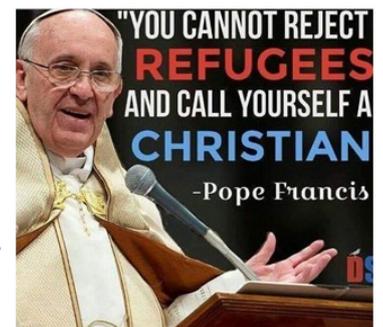
In fact Australia’s policies – its outsourcing of detention and refugee status determination – has regularly seen people returned to significant harm. Since the advent of offshore processing (then known as the “Pacific Solution”) in 2001, asylum seekers judged not entitled to Australia’s protection have been returned to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Bangladesh, Vietnam and a host of other countries. The main forces driving movement being war, civil unrest and persecution. Dozens forcibly returned to their home countries have faced arrest, violence and persecution. Some have died, murdered on return.

What is happening to people seeking asylum in Australia as ‘boat arrivals’ is easy to answer—the why is bewildering.

This cannot be about national security. If Australia’s security is so tenuous that we are frightened of some thousands of people escaping regimes where their lives and livelihoods were at risk, we need very different protections.

The official answer to the question of why is always that this is a system maintained to deter people trying to get to Australia by boat. Without a visa (impossible for an asylum seeker from Afghanistan, Iran, and Sri Lanka) there was no way to seek protection in Australia. The Australian navy has effectively stopped people coming in boats from these countries . So why continue to punish those who came in 2011—13? The only answer that we can come up with is that successive governments have seen domestic political advantage by doing so.

Targeting particular groups of people is always cruel and usually politically fraught. This has happened in varying ways to Muslim Australians, young Sudanese Australians, and more recently Australians of Chinese descent. We can be better than this.



I was a stranger and you made me welcome...

BASP Discussion Session 1 – 2022

2pm –3.30 pm

Wednesday, 23rd March

At 54 Beaconsfield Pde Albert Park

What has been happening since we last met!

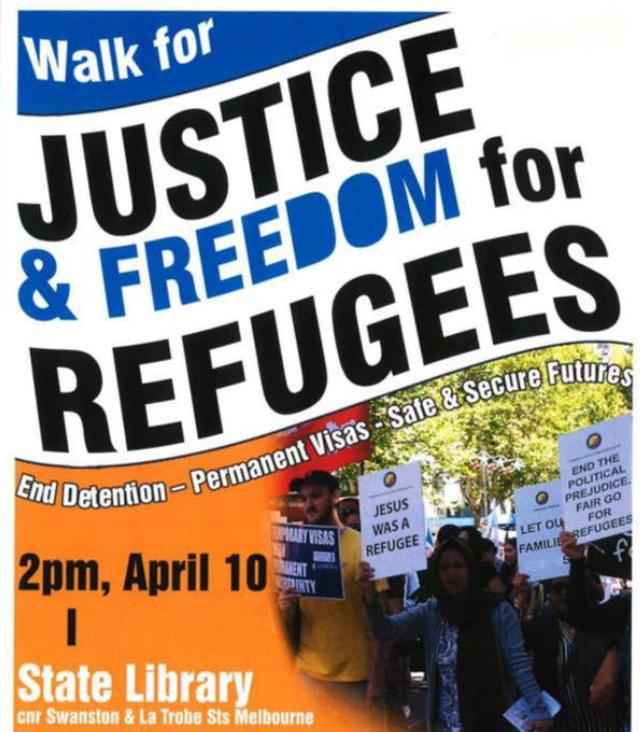
Because we have not been able to meet in person since Covid restrictions, we will use this opportunity to have a conversation about our work and more generally, the situation for people seeking asylum.

Another calendar item: a fundraiser for BASP.

Annual Trivia Night will be held on Friday May, 6th by zoom

\$25 per person. Come and join a table or make a table of 8-10 people. BYO food and drinks. Tea and Coffee provided.

Contact: Colette 9598 7329 or colfoxw@gmail.com



What if we found ourselves with no money and no prospect of getting any....

Most of those supported by BASP have no income support. Why?

Not having any regular income—no matter who we are or where we live almost inevitably causes health problems (mental and physical). Social and structural poverty with its lack of security causes a sense of failure that colours ones life.

Right to work

There are currently about 95,000 asylum seekers in Australia, about 30,000 of whom have had asylum refused at both the initial and by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal stage. Of these a certain percentage do not have work rights and are not legally able to work.

So why has Australia built in long term destitution into the policies around refugees?

Loss of SRSS: In an ‘on-off’ way the federal government has given limited income support to asylum seekers who have no capacity to work or haven’t been able to access work. The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) and its previous iterations have historically supported people seeking asylum to meet their basic healthcare and living needs, as they are ineligible for any other form of Government-funded social security support. It was not overly generous, \$247 per week for most. Over the past several years, as a result of changes to the SRSS, many people seeking asylum have lost financial support and access to critical services. This has put them at risk of poverty, destitution and homelessness. Many have been in the community for more than eight years waiting for a decision about their visa status.



The most vulnerable were meant to be kept on SRSS but many whose payments were cut are in the most desperate circumstances one can imagine; for example an elderly couple with multiple health problems and no capacity at all to work, a mother with two disabled children, a blind man.

It has not meant less money is expended but, although it saves the government money, it is now the job of charities and the community to provide the funding needed to keep people from being homeless and destitute.

Immigration’s response was “Individuals on a bridging visa with work rights and who have the capacity to work are expected to support themselves prior to being granted a substantive visa or departing Australia,” the spokesperson said. “Those who have the capacity to work are expected to support themselves.” **But many can’t work!**

We think over 10,000 were cut from the program—but the actual number is not known.

Impact of Covid: The impact of the pandemic on refugees and asylum seekers, who are mostly employed in low-income and insecure jobs, was considerable. Asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas and refugees who have been granted temporary protection visas are at a huge risk if they lose their jobs. They are not eligible for welfare support such as the JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments.

Men transferred under Medivac legislation

Those refugees and asylum seekers from Manus Island and Nauru who were brought to Australia for medical treatment are either still in detention centres or have been released into the community. Those released get no income after the first 3 –6 weeks. After nine years in detention they are then expected to work.

The average time in detention is now 689 days!



The trouble with one man’s God-like powers: for Novak Djokovic and asylum seekers

At the time of the Australian Tennis Open, the general public was focused on the outcome of a match being played off the court—between the number one tennis player and Australia’s immigration authorities. BASP has been very interested in aspects of the case that throw light on how visa cancellation works for asylum seekers and refugees.

In the Migration Act that governs all such powers, the personal powers of the Minister for Immigration are:

- *non-compellable* – i.e., you can’t force the Minister to make a decision or ever consider the case.
- *Non-delegable* – i.e., only one of the Home Affairs portfolio ministers can make the decision

In the first Federal Court hearing Judge Anthony Kelly noted “What more could this man have done? So his visa was restored. In the second Federal Court case, three judges gave the decision in favour of the Commonwealth (Minister) that the Minister’s ruling that the tennis player was to be deported should stand. They noted that the Minister was not obliged to give reasons for his decision. In fact a reason was given but it was blatantly an opinion not backed up by any evidence. So Djokovic was deported.



Over the past years, only one Minister of Immigration appears to have been troubled by the extreme powers given to the role. Chris Evan talked about the God-like powers he had - he only remained Minister for a matter of months. For refugees and asylum seekers it means that potentially unlawful visa cancellations stand without any avenue for redress.

The Minister can override any court decisions

- Personal power of the Minister to cancel/override a positive decision of a delegate or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal if the Minister does not personally agree with it
- The Minister only has to say a decision is in the national interest

So in the Djokovic case, with all the resources he had to get legal help, he was still detained and deported.

People seeking asylum often have no avenues for a procedural fairness or access to merits review. As well as having the power to grant a visa on discretionary grounds, the Minister can now turn around someone at an airport or override officials decisions, detain or re-detain a person seeking asylum without any warning, send them to an offshore detention centre, refuse or cancel their visa on character grounds, and, in some circumstances, deny any possibility of the review of a decision not to grant an applicant a protection visa. (We remember Peter Dutton’s intervention in 2015 to grant visas to two au pairs who arrived on tourist visas and were facing deportation at the airport.)

What is needed?

These decision-making responsibilities need to be shifted from the Minister to public officials and made open, transparent, compellable and reviewable. Since these are enshrined in the Migration Act, a review of this Act (with all its accretions over the past few decades) is needed. As it stands now, our migration system is very unfair— in some aspects appallingly so.

BASP Housing



BASP, like so many others, seeks the release of the men detained in the Park Hotel and welcomes it when it occurs. It can also lead to some rapid action by BASP for the men needing housing after their 3 week paid transition period. A further 6 men were released in December and needed housing by Christmas. Again BASP had good fortune. The Carmelite priests in Middle Park provided 3 single units for 2-3 months, one went to a BASP share house and BASP was able to secure a rental property for 2 men who were related and wanted to be together. We then had a group of people getting furniture and basic goods into each place before the Christmas break. It was all achieved, thanks to all who helped us get there.

With the issue of housing resolved quickly, these men have shown amazing resourcefulness in seeking work. 3 are working full time or close to, another is doing casual work and 2 have completed courses in preparation for work. Amongst the men from the Medevac group who were released a year ago, many are now in employment and able to move to their own housing or at least to pay rent and utilities in their BASP house, making it cost neutral to BASP. This enables us to pay the rent for others who have no income or capacity to work.

From January we have begun regular rental for a man who is vision impaired, has been waiting for his visa for 9 years and whose benefits had been stopped. He lives in a share house where he is supported by friends and is familiar with the area. He is not able to work at this point and will need support until his visa is determined, positively! How long will that be? Who knows.

We also thank Mary and Paul who have made a house available to BASP for the past 7 or 8 years. Many asylum seekers have lived in this house on arrival and it has been a stepping stone to getting established and moving on. The property has returned to them now and we thank them most sincerely for their generosity and support to so many.

Generosity of others continues to encourage and delight us. A recent call from a man in the community offering a rent free one bedroom unit was just what we needed for a man needing to move from his short term housing. Having been in detention with others for 9 years - sharing a tent with 40 others for 7 of those years - he is desperate to live alone. This offer, which is near public transport and services, will be perfect.

BASP is currently providing about 260 people with accommodation and many more with emergency relief money and paying utility bills. While this is a challenge for a small organization like us to maintain, it is also a source of huge satisfaction to know that people have a roof over their heads and some capacity to buy food and pay for their phone and transport.

What fun

A day of singing and dancing was had by a group of Iranian women and their children when they attended the Multicultural Festival hosted by Presentation Family Centre (PFC) in Balnarring in late January.

BASP arranged a bus to collect them at Southern Cross Station in the morning and amazingly they all arrived before the bus had to leave! With Omicron on the march we were concerned about the bus trip but the women were keen for an outing and wanted to proceed.

PFC- now renamed as Saltbush Balnarring Beach- had arranged entertainment from a range of different cultures. Wellsprings for Women, a neighbourhood house in Dandenong provided much of the food and another bus group. A hot day and one enjoyed by all.



Current issues that need consideration

Nauru offshore detention company making \$500,000 profit a year for each detainee
The company behind Australia's offshore processing regime on Nauru made a staggering \$101 million profit last financial year.
The cost to hold a single refugee on Nauru is now \$4m a year (for approximately 115 people). Imagine what that sort of money could provide to Australia's most disadvantaged if only the Government were to adopt a reasonable, compassionate approach to refugees seeking a safe home and a life beyond war-torn countries.
The Guardian Australia reports that from November 2017 to January 2021, the Australian government spent more than \$1.67bn on "garrison and welfare" for those held on the island. The vast majority of that – nearly \$1.3bn – was paid to its three "primary entities": construction and facilities management firm Construct International; healthcare provider International Health and Medical Services (IHMS); and the government of Nauru.

An Australian Government funded "Zero Chance campaign" in Sri Lanka is a competition for budding young film makers where the films must be based on 'illegal migration to Australia'.

Submissions were asked to depict "getting caught by people smugglers, risking your life in the rough seas, the effect on the lives of families [and] loved ones and issues faced after being sent back to Sri Lanka."

Successful films could win prizes whose added value totals over \$5000, including a camera, a drone, and a GoPro. Essentially, the Australian government is asking for native filmmakers to create free propaganda for its anti-immigration agenda, for a chance to win a camera.

Some of the entries were in the form of games where no matter what moves were made none ended up with a successful entry to Australia.

It seems unbelievable that we have to keep reminding the Australian authorities that asylum seeking is not illegal. It's a human right under international law.

The case for the family from Biloea is a very important test case.

For the past years of conflict, thousands of Afghans who fled to Europe were deported back into danger. Afghan refugees who sought asylum in Australia have been held for years in immigration detention centres in Australia, Nauru and Manus Island. As of October 2021, there were 50 Afghans in immigration detention. A small few have been deported, many others "voluntarily" returned after their claims for asylum were rejected and they faced a lifetime in detention.

The several thousand Afghans who have been offered temporary protection visas live in fear that one day they too could be forcibly returned. Another 7,490 reside in Indonesia, barred from legal resettlement to Australia due to legislation steered by then immigration minister Morrison in 2014. There were a few stories in the media of Afghans being evacuated to Australia as Kabul fell but they are vastly outweighed by accounts of people being left behind. Even the Afghans who worked as interpreters for our Defense Forces have not been guaranteed safety in Australia. The government has allocated 3,000 resettlement places for Afghan refugees out of the annual quota of 13,750 places. In October, the number of applicants exceeded 100,000. So far no Afghans have been resettled from these applications—in fact most applications have not been acknowledged. We should not forget those Afghans stuck in PNG, Nauru and Indonesia.

By sheer chance really BASP has had some on-going communication with an Afghan refugee in PNG. He is stuck there with virtually no support and extremely worried about his family's safety. A few days ago he sent this message:

I am not well .Taliban found my family in kabul they enter to my house just asked this is Zaher house 🏠 but nobody there just my small daughter inside house she told them .i dont know Zaher

For some reason, Australia's response to asylum seekers who are nationals from Afghanistan and the Middle East in general, Africa, and Asia---has never been the same response as those currently having to leave Ukraine. The prime minister recently instructed the immigration minister, Alex Hawke, to put visa applications from Ukrainians "to the top of the pile".

By 'go to the top of the pile', what does this say in regards to those fleeing the horrors of the Taliban in Afghanistan?" (Of course we should also take people fleeing Ukraine. We can afford to do both.)

Memories come flashing back

Every Christmas we get a Christmas card from a man we have known for over thirteen years. It never says much except to wish us a happy Christmas. Just occasionally there is a phone call. In January we got one such excited call to say his wife and children had joined him in Australia, that he had citizenship and the world was a good place!

It is a sobering fact that even after all this time we are not going to reveal much of his story. He is frightened about any publicity (possibly even in a small BASP newsletter) and we respect this. However we can talk about some of what happened.

In 2016 we had a phone call “Mam I have just got a Permanent Protection Visa”. In the mid-1990s a promising young cricketer (let’s call him Mukisa) completed his apprenticeship as a mechanic and became involved in local politics. However when the Government changed, he was threatened and beaten on several occasions and threatened because of his political activities. He decided to get a tourist visa and leave for Australia. So after some very frightening experiences which involved severe back injuries, Mukisa managed to get on a plane and came to Australia in 2005.

He applied for protection but was rejected at each stage of the process. Eventually in 2008 he was detained in the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre. Brigid visited him quite regularly while he was there and one night he rang to say he was being deported the next morning. Brigid was in Adelaide at a meeting and was quite non-plussed about what action to take (if any). However someone said that a direct application to UNHCR could possibly prevent the deportation. Hurriedly and in between meetings on that evening she managed to get an application sent to the UN office. Before the fax even went through Mukisa rang again to say he was being taken to the airport. We were not to know what plane he was being put on but a call to the airlines determined that the first flight for his home country was in the morning at 7am. Miraculously the UN instructed the Australian Government not to deport him until investigations had been carried out.

These investigations went on and on until 2013. In the meantime BASP had contacted a wonderful group in Sydney (as part of the Balmain Uniting Church) who took up the fight for Mukisa and in mid-2013 the UN told Australia that Mukisa had a well-founded fear of persecution if he was returned to his home country and he should be given a Permanent Visa. Luckily about this time a precedent was set with another refugee and this enabled Mukisa to resubmit his case for protection in Australia. After another three years, Mukisa was informed he has been granted a Permanent Visa.

In the meantime he has lost contact with his wife and two children. His mother has been constantly threatened by police because she has maintained she did not know anything of his activities and her house was burned down – with the police refusing to investigate.

Red Cross managed to trace the family and nearly two decades later they have been reunited.

Mukisa’s application in 2009 did not even go to the Minister who had the power to ensure he wasn’t deported and it was on that basis that we made the application to UNHCR for him to remain in Australia until his claims for protection were further investigated. A person’s safety (life) should not rely on miracles!

There is a proposed law before Parliament seeking to amend the Citizenship Act and the Migration Act to restrict the possibilities for a migrant or citizen to respond to their visa or citizenship being stripped from them by the ‘Home Affairs’ Minister. It is called Strengthening the Character Test Bill but in reality it is just another way of allowing people to be deported. Immigration authorities have all the powers needed to detain and eventually deport people if they pose threats to Australia's security. We trust it is not passed before the coming election—or after!

Two different attempts to raise consciousness in the community about the fate of the men in the Park Hotel (and in other detention centres)

The Freedom Cage, as we're calling it, is primarily being run by a small number of individuals. One of those responsible told us that it is a spontaneous, grassroots movement. The intention is to use the cage as a symbolic representation of what our country is doing to the men in the Park Hotel, and their brothers and sisters across the nation and offshore; it is an effort to create a spectacle that grabs people's attention and raises awareness. It's also an invitation for members of the community and high-profile figures to come and show their solidarity with the refugees by spending some time in the cage. The idea for the cage arose from a sense of the urgency of this crisis.

On a Saturday afternoon in February, a few faith leaders prayed for those detained in the streets outside the Park hotel. Part of the action was to spend some time in the cage.



Brigid joined Baptist minister Reverend Tim Costello and Uniting Church minister Reverend Alexandra Sangster for a peaceful protest outside the Park Hotel, calling for the release of the men who have been held in detention by the Australian Government for almost nine years.

Brigid offered an apology to the detainees for the mistreatment they have received:

'You came to our country asking only for protection, and to our shame we locked you up and we're still punishing you. We are sorry.'

'We lament a lack of understanding of what it means to be an asylum seeker, forced to leave all that you love. We are sorry.'

'We lament that we have forgotten our roots. We pray that you will feel our love and support.'

A very touching moment was when Brigid was in the cage, a small four year old little boy entreated his mother, 'Can we let her out?' He actively tried to open the gate to the cage when it was time. Would that those who could do this for those locked up inside were so moved!

The #SetThemFree campaign is endorsed by 30 religious leaders, including Baptist minister The Rev'd Tim Costello and Anglican Bishop Philip Huggins. The leaders are asking the Prime Minister and the Opposition leader to work together for the release of all refugees and people seeking asylum indefinitely detained onshore and offshore. The group commissioned a short video (from acclaimed director Richard Keddie: Ride Like a Girl, Oddball, Little Fish), and narrated by Tim Costello. It highlights Mr Morrison's apparent contradictory stances on showing compassion to others.



The video appears to portray the Prime Minister as a hypocrite whose actions as a politician do not align with his public statements on the importance of standing "on the side of the poor and the hungry".

The video was launched in St Paul's Cathedral and Brigid was invited to join the faith leaders and spoke briefly "The Prime Minister and Opposition Leader have the power to set them free. It is a question of whether they will open their hearts and act, not a question of what to do."



Profiling amazing volunteers

Noelle Mawdsley

When Noelle came to live in Middle Park in 2003, she began volunteering at Sacred Heart Mission and AMES because she always had a keen sense of social justice and wanted to do something practical to assist those less fortunate than herself.

Later, an article in the local paper drew Noelle's attention to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project and she called in to see if there was any way she could assist. Sr Catherine Kelly, one of the co-founders of BASP, took Noelle to the small pantry and said it would be very helpful if she could organize it. Also, Catherine added, there are other donations that needed attention. Noelle was then shown a large room chock full of unsorted miscellaneous goods. Always one to rise to a challenge, Noelle commenced her 14 years of volunteering at BASP.

A larger pantry and continuing generous donations from BASP supporters now enables Noelle, often assisted by Barb Myer, to prepare food boxes which are delivered weekly by other volunteers to about 24 families. Individuals can also call at the Centre when in need of supplies. Noelle continues to be responsible for sorting all the other donations in kind (except furniture) that BASP receives and determining where these goods can be put to best use.

Why does Noelle do this? She believes we can feel overwhelmed and powerless to respond to endless reports of people in need in our world.

Being engaged in doing something practical is satisfying and can make a big difference to some people. Noelle has enjoyed meeting asylum seekers and refugees and just wishes more people could have contact with them and hear their stories.



Despite the many examples of terrible treatment of people seeking asylum, it is always a joy when we see success or even a moment of genuine fun and enjoyment. 3 of the women who live in a share house - all different circumstances, nationalities and languages- were having fun. The youngest one took the photo and sent it to BASP. Their playfulness is evident in this photo where they described themselves as daughter/mother/grandmother.

News of family from Echuca

Today Andrew starts secondary school at St Joe's, Bryan starts Prep and Celeste moves into Year 5. And Nicole is starting her cleaning job at the Golf Club- 6 days a week, 9-3.

Thank you for sending them to us three and a half years ago. Our community and our town are enriched by their presence here. Cecilia



In 2018, a Syrian mother and 2 children 18 and 15 were in desperate need of housing and support while their application for protection was processed. BASP was able to provide this in a unit in Thomastown. The father had died, their home in Syria bombed and their arrival in Australia had been traumatic. Once they were granted permanent protection, they received Centrelink and paid rent and all bills in the BASP house. Once they were more fully established, they secured a rental property in their own name and moved out after Christmas. The mother's note to BASP read: 'I wish to take this opportunity to wish you a merry Christmas and happy new year for this festive season. Also, to thank you for all your continual support for my family to help us settling in this beautiful and safe country and brought us hopes to me and my children. I hope one day we can have the opportunity to assist others in our situation.'



Christmas

While Christmas seems a while ago now, it always a busy time at BASP and heartening to see responses from people in the community as well as from people seeking asylum.

St Finbar's parish again provided a large number of hampers all prepared and ready for us to distribute.

We received additional hampers and goods for hampers from many groups and individuals. One such contribution was fifty bags with papers, crayons, pencils—so good for children's activities.

Handbags filled with goodies to pamper the women and mums were donated by the wonderful people at St Martins Hawksburn and Christ Church, South Yarra.

Noelle and Barb coordinated these at the office and a band of volunteers delivered the hampers to homes across Melbourne. Thank you and well done all.



Another response was from a young woman who, after reading our last newsletter, asked the people at her workplace to read the newsletter and donate to BASP at Christmas.

Recipients of the hampers were also delighted by something a bit special in their lives. This one 'Hello this is Evren and my mother .

We just want to say THANK YOU so much for the presents they are gorgeous and happy Christmas' and 'Hi Libby thank you soo much for bringing smiles on my kids faces they loved the Christmas hamper God bless you all ☐'

After Christmas, some **tickets to Bluey** were made available through an offer to Catholic Social Services. The mother was thrilled to receive this special gift 'Thank you so much. Girls will be so happy.'

Invaluable Volunteers.

A family, who live in a house donated by the owner for BASP use and who has no income, a sick husband/father and 2 daughters, has 2 volunteers who continued to support them through 2021 when they needed food and basics. After a recent health scare and hospital admission, the wife sent us a message 'my husband came to home today and Dale helped us again to get him home from hospital. You people are helped us in all situations. Thank you so much'.

Another tireless volunteer, Marie, made her holiday home in Lorne available for 4 or 5 families to use over the summer to give them all a change of routine and a moment of relaxation.

One included a mum and her older daughter having a break from the constant care of the younger daughter with complex care needs. Dad and a carer assisted her for a few days at home.

Another volunteer has been visiting a mum and her 2 yo. Having recovered from Covid herself, she then went to assist this mother when she and her daughter contracted Covid. " I took some more groceries to her and brought home some of the daughter's clothes to wash, as they can't access (communal) laundry facilities during isolation. I'll take them back tomorrow. I kept my mask on and didn't go inside. "

The 3 men housed in Middle Park a couple of days prior to Christmas needed some friendship and orientation after 9 years of detention and no idea of Melbourne or where Middle Park was in relation to anywhere else. A local volunteer made time, despite the hectic Christmas period, to make contact and help with some of this, including banking, post office, and coffee!

Many more volunteers make positive contributions each week to the lives of people seeking asylum. These are just examples of what is achieved by so many. Through our volunteers, the coordinators stay connected with many families and individuals, where this would otherwise not be possible.

We are grateful for any of the following food (or vouchers to buy food and household necessities).



We currently have enough tinned food except for cans of fruit and tomatoes.

The following are still very much appreciated:

Sugar, cooking oil, salt, pepper, tea, coffee

Herbs and spices

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese. Eggs.

Long life milk, **honey is a most appreciated food**, noodles, tuna, basmati rice, dates, jam (especially any red jam)

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches (even when home!), Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger, Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste and toothbrushes. Soap, deodorants

Garbage bags (small and large)



We seemingly never have enough washing powder, dish washing detergents and household cleaning products.

For anyone wishing to make a donation, the Project Bank details are: Brigidine Asylum Seekers Trust Account: bsb: 083-004; a/c: 56-924-6603; NAB.

Please put your name on the entry and please email us at contact@basp.org.au after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt. We will send a newsletter but feel free to tell us that you don't want one.



We are constantly amazed at the generosity of our supporters. We wish we could always say thank you personally but sometimes we can't—often enough because we just get too busy. Know that all your help is what keeps us going. The rents that get paid and the money for basic necessities that we are able to give is because of the donations we receive from those who support us.



We now have quite a large number of regular donors. This money coming in regularly is really helpful. We often have people who have a garage sale or make furniture and give us the money earned, or the young people who do busking and give their earnings in to help asylum seekers—there are so many creative ways where people find an opportunity to raise some money for BASP. Among our regular supporters are schools and parishes—thank you. And then the one-off quite large donations are a boon.

Your support is invaluable to us, thank you again!

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)